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Agca's Other Story: The Plot to Kill Walesa

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ROME, Oct. 26 — Mehmet Ali Agca, the central figure in the conspiracy case in the attempted assassination of Pope John Paul II, has partly recanted his testimony about another purported plot, to kill Lech Walesa. But his testimony included a wealth of details, many of which were independently corroborated by investigating magistrates.

Much of what he said about the Walesa plot in one hundred pages of still-secret testimony implicated the same three Bulgarians who were indicted today on charges of conspiring along with four Turks to kill the Pope.

Those close to the case here say they believe that his credibility on one case will affect his credibility on the other.

Mr. Agca, who was convicted on July 22, 1981, of shooting the Pope the previous May 13, offered a wealth of detail about a plot on Mr. Walesa, the leader of the independent Polish labor union Solidarity, most of which has not been published before. Many of these details were confirmed by the police, by the man who invited Mr. Walesa to visit Rome, where the plot to kill him purportedly unfolded, and by one of the Bulgarians accused of conspiring to kill the Pope.

Mr. Agca stopped cooperating in the investigation of the plot on the Pope and recanted part of his testimony about the purported plot on Mr. Walesa on June 28, 1983, as soon as he could after he found out about a kidnapping of the daughter of a Vatican employee. The kidnapping may have convinced him that his Turkish or Bulgarian accomplices were trying to get him out of prison.

In his retraction, Mr. Agca said he had learned the details of the plot on Mr. Walesa when a judge read testimony from another witness. But many of the details Mr. Agca had provided were not in that testimony, and the testimony had not yet been taken at the time Mr. Agca said he had heard it.

Since his retraction, Mr. Agca has not given the magistrates any more information on either the shooting of the Pope or the plot on Mr. Walesa, but they are convinced of the accuracy of his previous testimony. That testimony will be used in the conspiracy trial of three Bulgarians and four Turks. Mr. Agca himself is facing another trial on new charges.

More than a dozen transcripts of interrogations between November 1982 and March 1983 have not been available to other reporters, and these show that Mr. Agca began to speak of a plot on Mr. Walesa midway through his long confession on the shooting of the Pope. He had not done so earlier, he said, "to avoid making my judicial situation graver."

Mr. Agca proved to know far more about Mr. Walesa's visit than the press reported, even though he was talking of an event two years earlier in a city foreign to him and was describing places he could not have revisited in his year and a half behind bars.

Mr. Agca's first reference was brief. On Nov. 9, 1982, he told the investigating Magistrate, Ilario Martella, that he was approached in December 1980 to kill Mr. Walesa by Maj. Zhelyo K. Vasilev, the Bulgarian military attaché's secretary in Rome. According to Mr. Agca, Major Vasilev was one of his three Bulgarian accomplices in the conspiracy against the Pope.

Invitation to Walesa

The reference to a Walesa plot brought another judge into the picture, Ferdinando Imposimato, who was investigating whether Luigi Scricciolo, the man who had invited Mr. Walesa to Rome, was engaged in espionage for Bulgaria. Mr. Scricciolo delivered the invitation to Mr. Walesa in December 1980 on behalf of Italy's Socialist Labor Federation.

Mr. Agca was questioned on the matter at least once again by Judge Martella and half a dozen times by Judge Imposimato. This is what Agca said.

He asserted that he had attended two meetings to discuss the Walesa project at the home of Todor S. Aivasov, a second Bulgarian accomplice. The third Bulgarian, Sergei I. Antonov, was present both times, he said. So was "a certain Ivan Tomov," Mr. Agca said, who "told me he lived in the same building." He identified the four "with absolute certainty" from an album of mug shots.

His interrogators then told him that Ivan Tomov's last name was Dontchev. Mr. Scricciolo had told Judge Imposimato about Mr. Dontchev the previous summer. Listed as a third secretary in the Bulgarian Embassy, Mr. Dontchev headed a Bulgarian spy ring in Rome

from 1978 until the fall of 1982, according to an Italian police report.

Meetings of Bulgarians

Mr. Antonov has not indicated publicly that he even knew these people, but he told Judge Imposimato on March 11, 1983, that he knew Mr. Aivasov, Major Vasilev and Mr. Dontchev quite well and "had often visited Aivasov's house" because they were all part of "our small Bulgarian community."

The meetings Mr. Agca spoke of took place "a few days before Walesa arrived in Rome" and "directly after his arrival" on Jan. 13, 1981, Mr. Agca said.

Mr. Antonov's defense lawyer has contended that he was in Sofia, Bulgaria, when these meetings occurred, but Mr. Antonov acknowledged to Judge Imposimato that he had been in Sofia for the New Year and had returned to Rome on Jan. 5.

Mr. Dontchev, who was in charge at the meetings, said he was getting the necessary information for the killing "from Italian labor leaders close to Walesa, who were in contact with him and could supply every detail on his movements," Mr. Agca declared. Mr. Agca did not claim to know who the labor leaders were.

3 Spots for an Attack

From these labor union sources, Mr. Agca continued, Mr. Dontchev learned of three possible places for the attack. He said Mr. Walesa would stay a night or two at the Casa del Pellegrino, "a small religious institute on Via Cassia," would otherwise lodge at the Hotel Victoria and "had made an appointment with foreign journalists" at the Foreign Press Club.

Judge Imposimato, amazed at the wealth of particulars Mr. Agca supplied from the start, wrote to Rome's police headquarters to request verification of seven key points. The police responded that although the fact had been kept secret for security reasons, Mr. Walesa did spend the first and last nights of his visit at Casa del Pellegrino, which few Rome residents, the judge included, had ever heard of.

Mr. Agca said he and Mr. Dontchev, Mr. Vasilev and Mr. Antonov twice inspected the three sites. "We used Vasilev's car, a Fiat 128 with diplomatic plates," he said. "To view the Hotel Victoria, we used a light blue Peugeot with Rome plates driven by Antonov."

Mr. Antonov, questioned later by Judge Imposimato, denied knowing of any plot on Mr. Walesa but confirmed that Mr. Vasilev had a Fiat 128. Mr. Antonov also said he occasionally drove a blue Peugeot owned by Balkan Air, where he worked.

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